Every book of the Bible is important because each one is inspired by God. Certain books draw us close to them time and again because of their strong encouragement, powerful teaching and practical wisdom. The Apostle Paul provided us with great examples of the joy we will experience when we serve in the name of Jesus. Join the men of Lakeside for a 5-week study in the book of Philippians as we see what it means to fully serve our God and experience the joy He has in store for us.
Getting Into the Word

Introduction

To live Christ, we must first come to know who Jesus Christ is. Understanding Christ comes when we begin to step deeper and deeper into His heart, and to do this we can look at the profound words of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians. The epistle to the Philippians vividly displays the awesome nature of Jesus Christ through His life of righteousness (1.11), servanthood (2.7), and power that transforms our lives into conformity with “His Glory” (3.21). Such a transformation in our lives brings about peace and joy that illumines the reality that to live the triumphant, joyful life fully absorbed in Victory, is as Paul writes, “For me to Live is Christ,” –1.21.

What does it mean when Paul states, “To Live is Christ, but to die is gain”? It means, that ultimately, life in the physical presence of Christ will far exceed the limits of our imagination, but even with that said, Christ desires for each of our days to be moments of divine love poured out on today’s individualistic and self-centered world. As a follower of Christ, to “Live is Christ” means that we seek to do the will of God which means to engulf the world in His love.

However, in the midst of today’s negativity and doubt concerning faith, many claim that Paul just does not understand what it means to be a follower of Christ today. . . Really? Maybe we are the ones who have it wrong?

Paul is a credible witness: one only needs to look at his life to realize that he was sold out for the gospel. Look at Paul’s life and trials:

Cor. 11.23-28 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Yeah beaten, flogged, stoned, etc., all because of his devotion to Christ. Paul is like Junior Dos Santos, Rocky Marciano, Dan Gable, Pat Smith or Cael Sanderson – tough as nails. The point is, if we question Paul’s character and his words about following Christ, then who will ever be able to convince us. The question is, do you want to believe Jesus is who the Bible says He is, and that He is calling you to step up and step in to His reconciliatory performance? Iron only strengthens when it is sharpened.

Paul is practical as well as profound. He never leaves us in the clouds. He never separates knowledge from action. Christianity is both word and deed. Our faith is meant to be lived out. The Bible is meant for performance. Christ’s incarnational performance is that which we are called to follow, enter into and live out ourselves! Think of your life and how much we gain
confidence through the rewards of this world. But the world does not have *Truth* to offer or build our confidence on. So we must continually ask ourselves, what should our confidence be in and how do we maintain and grow in this source? How can we be *in* the world but not *of* the world? Theologian Karl Barth once wrote that “Christians do not strive ‘against’ anybody (nor *for* anybody either!), but *for the faith!*” The pages of *Philippians* contain life lessons and role models of faith—people who challenge believers to put faith in action.

The book of *Philippians* was written between A.D. 60 and 62 during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. The book is a letter to explain his imprisonment and to thank and encourage the church (specifically the *Philippians*). Paul includes the following themes:

† **Joy** – Paul modeled joy in the midst of suffering and guided the *Philippians* in their situation of persecution (1.27-30; 2.14-16). He expressed joy in their “partnership in the gospel” (1.4-5), unity (2.2), preaching of the gospel (1.18), faith (1.25), relationship to Christ (1.26; see 3.1; 4.4, 10), and suffering and service (2.17). His joy is derived from his union with Christ (3.8; 4.12-13), his communion with other Christians (1.4-5), and the promise of the resurrection (3.10-11, 20-21).

† **Humility** – Believers are to imitate Christ, who modeled humility (2.3-4) by emptying Himself in order to obey God the Father and serve others, even to the point of death on the cross (2.8). Christ’s willingness to come to earth in human form represents the opposite of the human drive to dominate and Paul calls the church to follow that example. Look at *James 4.10* for further study on humility.

† **Thanksgiving** – Paul commended Epaphroditus for his life-endangering service to him. He also acknowledged and thanked the *Philippians* for their missionary partnership and gift to him. Paul had served them sacrificially (2.17), and they had responded in kind. He commended them for their Christian maturity, affirmed that they had received spiritual benefits from giving, and assured them of God’s reward. Paul did more than express gratitude; he showed what such sharing means in the life of the Christian community.

Paul’s letter to the *Philippians* reveals the timeless message that true joy is to be found only in a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ and in assurance that God is able to turn adverse circumstances to our good and His glory. For Jesus’ life is a life that not only happened at a certain point in history, but continues to happen, spilling out into the lives of those who receive Him, and then continues to spill out all over the place. Christ is, among much else, the revelation that God cannot be contained or hoarded. It is the “spilling out” quality of Christ’s life that accounts for the happiness of Christians, for joy is life in excess, the overflow of what cannot be contained within any one person. Paul urged the *Philippians* to rejoice because they were allowed to suffer for Christ (1.29).

“The joy of the Lord is your strength,” the prophet Nehemiah tells us (Neh 8.10). The word “rejoice” or “joy” occurs in this letter to the *Philippians* 16 times. Paul seems to laugh out loud for sheer joy in this Epistle. We are commanded to rejoice. It helps in the midst of trials. It hardly seems possible that Paul is writing from prison with chains holding him. His words seem to come from a light heart. There is an atmosphere of joy evening from prison.

Paul mentions the Savior’s name forty times in this short Epistle. Some of the most wonderful things concerning Christ and the Christian life are here. Christ must be our joy, our trust and our
aim in life. Throughout this study challenge yourself to dig deeper into the Word so as to grow in your joy and stronger in your service to the Kingdom. Think on the following:

• Find opportunities to share and participate in the ministries of the church
• Examine your “contentment quotient.” Are you satisfied with what you have? Are you growing in your contentment?
• Pray for an attitude of humility and self-sacrifice, one that looks first to the interests of others.
• Ask God to strengthen your faith so you will be able to courageously and fearlessly endure suffering for the sake of the gospel.
Week 1 - Philippians Chapter 1.1-20

Paul begins this letter the same way he begins most of his other letters: by emphasizing fundamentals. Paul opens his letter to the Philippians by thanking God for the Philippians and then prays for them (1.3-11). He goes on to point out that his imprisonment has advanced the gospel (1.12-18) and he looks forward to being set free in response to their prayers (1.19-26). Do we have this attitude of contentment when facing trials, injustice, trouble, etc.? Paul focuses on the positive, highlighting the blessing of his imprisonment rather than its hardship. None of us will end up in a 1st century prison, but we still have our own “prisons.” How do you handle your prison settings, with contentment and joy, or negativity and resentment? How can we share in Paul’s attitude (which is the same as that of Christ- Phil 2.3-5)?

Not only is Paul’s attitude amazing, but so is his confidence in prayer! Do we believe that when we pray for one another our prayers will actually be answered? What examples of answered prayer have rocked and/or encouraged your prayer life?

For Paul, Christ is the sum and substance of life and followers of Jesus, who are united to Christ by a living faith, can, just as Paul, claim contentment in all circumstances. Our unadorned testimony can be the same as Paul’s “I rejoice . . . and will rejoice” (1.18) and his unqualified command was, “Rejoice . . . again I will say rejoice!” (4.4). Rather than complain about his circumstances, Paul rejoices because his jailing is winnings souls of influential people in Rome. Paul loved to call himself the servant (bondservant) of Jesus Christ. And although in prison because of his willingness to go beyond the expected work of a servant (slave), Paul still saw fit to elevate the other: “I thank God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy,” (1.3-4).

Paul lived to intercede for others. So should every Sunday school teacher, Christian friend, father, mother, brother or sister remember others in their prayers without ceasing. Paul’s words in this opening section describe the emotional ties to the Christians at Philippi and speak of his frequent prayers. Paul’s references to prayer are similarly interpreted within this interpersonal context. Paul gives thanks "in all my prayers for you all" (Phil 1.4):

The “for you” (hyper hymon) of intercession for each other presupposes that the one for whom the prayer is made is totally destitute. God must act for him, therefore I must pray for him. . . . Nowhere and never do [God’s people] live from the riches discovered in themselves and others.

Prayer is an expression of solidarity, and solidarity arises out of a common poverty and dependence on God. Do you have a prayer list? Do you talk with the Lord about your friends? Paul informs us that a loving fellowship with Christ and each other can hold Christians together no matter how the world is shaking. As Paul shifts from general greeting news, he talks about what has been happening with him and he is very positive giving the appearance that things are going very well.

Although Paul was in prison, chained to a soldier, people came to hear him preach. The Roman guards were so interested in the gospel that they spread it around. Christians who press on for
the sake of Christ when everything is against them encourage and stir up others. Paul’s letter outlines and discusses how every aspect of believers’ lives—mind, heart, attitude, and behavior—are to be transformed by God’s love in Christ. Paul’s passion is for the Philippians to grow in love, which brings knowledge and discernment and, of course, “the fruits of righteousness” (v. 11).

1. Think of someone who has played a big part in your spiritual growth or with someone whom you’ve greatly influenced. What emotions do you feel for that person and why?

2. Paul mentions his confidence that the Philippians will carry on their Christian growth (v.6-7, 9-10). What is the root of this confidence? Paul awakens us to the fact that in His love, God not only sought us out, but prepared us for the “good work” of His (and ours) Kingdom. The question is, are we going to work with God or against God? What does this look like?

3. Often in our “share and prayer” times we concentrate on illness, jobs and family problems. What does Paul pray for and how can we embrace this as a further model for our prayers?

4. We often build friendships on compatibility. We look for people who are likable and whom we admire. On what basis does Paul ground his love for the Philippians?

5. Paul is in prison, potentially facing the death penalty, yet he remains positive and hopeful. Think about a time when you had bad news or a bad experience actually turn out for the good. What happened to change “bad” into “good?”
6. Read verses 15 – 20. In times of adversity, people often begin to criticize and downgrade others, usually with impure motives. Recall an experience when you have seen this happen. How would Paul advise you to handle the situation?
Week 2 - Philippians 1.21 – 2.11

The last 4 verses of chapter 1 urge the Philippians to live as Christians should, even though this means suffering (1.27-30). Even in the midst of suffering Paul calls the church (he calls you and me) to conduct ourselves – that is, to live – “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1.27-29). A manner worthy of the gospel is a life compelled by our love of God and thus, propelled towards our love of the other. In a magnificent hymn Paul urges his readers to be humble and to follow the example of Christ, who, although He was “in the very nature of God,” became human and underwent death on the cross. God therefore exalted Him to the highest place (2.1-11). This leads to a further exhortation to his readers to serve God faithfully (2.12-18).

Reading through chapter two I am struck with the phrase “obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Obedient to death seems crazy enough but then Paul adds “even death on a cross!” (2.8). Why? Punishment by the cross was confined to slaves or to malefactors of the worst class. It was meant to be excruciatingly painful and humiliating. Among the Jews, as well as among the Romans, crucifixion was considered the most horrible form of death; to a Jew it would seem the most horrible form of the curse identified in Scripture, “He who is hanged is accursed of God” (Deut 21.23). Paul is emphasizing the magnitude God went to on our behalf through the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus so that our heart and mind’s eye might attempt to enter into the drama of Salvation!

As an example of His love, Jesus took the form of a bondservant – in Greek the word is doulos and means to be a servant, even a slave! The underlining premise is a servant for humanity’s sake (compare Isa. 50:5; Ps. 40:6-8; Heb. 10:5). We express the mind of humility in the same way Christ Jesus did. When we promote peace and unity among our brothers and sisters in Christ, looking out for the good of others, not our own selfish interests, we are demonstrating the mind of Christ, the mind of humility (Philippians 2.1-4). Jesus’ teaching on servanthood and suffering was not intended to merely inspire good behavior. Jesus wanted to impart (to give a part or share; to communicate the knowledge of; to make known) the spirit of servanthood, the sense of personal commitment and identity that He expressed when He said, “I am among you as He who serves” (Luke 22.27). Christ is calling us to “empty” ourselves of our selfish ambitions and self-centered acts. What a paradox that stretches our mind’s eye, to think that as we become “empty” of self and dependent on God, the Holy Spirit will use us mightily, but this is the life we are called to live faithfully and obediently.

How can you “empty” yourself today and beyond? What part of your attitude is the most difficult to yield to God? How can you become more of a servant today and tomorrow? Pray and ask God to help you become more like Jesus, serving the other as opposed to wanting or expecting to be served. Think of times you have placed yourself above others. Ask God to make you more willing to “empty” yourself so that you might become as Christ, a doulos (bondservant) for the sake of the Kingdom!

When the pressure is on, sometimes we can take action to change the situation while at other times circumstances are out of our control and when that happens, we can only wait for God’s action to deliver us. One way to deal with uncontrollable situations is to control our attitudes. Paul encourages the Philippians to consider the attitude they have toward one another and offers Jesus as the ultimate example of having the right attitude.
1. In verse 1:21 Paul says; “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Why can he say this in all sincerity?

2. Our response to Christ’s crazy insane love is to live loudly for Him. This is what Paul is saying when he states “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” That is, in all that we do, we should seek to glorify His name so that even without speaking, the world will know that we are followers of Christ. If we take to heart these 12 words of Paul, then Christ becomes the pattern of our life, and the person after which we would sculpture our person. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5.1-2). What, or better yet, who do we find ourselves imitating?

3. Think about a time when you were faced with an unpleasant situation that was out of your control, yet you remained positive. How were you able to look on the “brighter” side of things?

4. Read chapter 2 verses 3 & 4. What separates the humility described from the experience of being a “doormat” or letting people take advantage of you?

5. To “value others above yourselves” could imply allowing that the other guy is always right and should always have his way. Obviously, verse 3 does not mean this, so how do you value others above yourself without becoming a “doormat?”
6. Read chapter 2 verses 8 – 11. Jesus portrays the ideal example of humility and Paul describes the result of Christ’s humility. How can Jesus receive such glory and remain an example of humility?

7. On the basis of Christ’s example, how would you describe humility?
After the amazing hymn of praise ascending to heaven (2.1-11), Paul dove back down to earth with very practical implications for the Philippians: (1) He encouraged them, in light of Christ’s triumph and example, to continue their obedience, knowing that God would enable them; (2) He urged them to avoid “complaining” and “arguing;” (3) Their witness in the world depended on this, only if they were “blameless” and “pure” could they demonstrate Christ’s life to the world.

We can become discouraged at our inability to live up to Jesus’ example flawlessly, but Paul provides other positive examples. He brings them encouragement by commending two people they know very well. Timothy and Epaphroditus are down to earth models of what Paul wants the Philippians to learn. Paul’s discussion of these two men was more than a travelogue. It was an illustration of how two fellow believers were putting into practice the way of life the Bible calls us to live. To follow or imitate the life of a solid believer is called discipleship.

Discipleship is apprenticeship to the life of Jesus, focusing on Christ as Mentor and Model. Jesus chose to lay aside His divine form and adopt the lowly form of man. Even as a Man He did not choose wealth, power, or worldly position, but came as a servant and died the death of a criminal. In everything He humbled Himself, trusting God to exalt and establish His name. Discipleship may call the Christian to choose to lay aside rights much valued in our culture and to accept the life-role assigned by God. This role may not appear to be a place of acknowledgement, but trust God to choose how to establish and promote you (vs. 12, 13).

Jesus, in one of His last recorded prayers, asked the Father to protect the unity of His disciples and went on to cover those who would believe through their witness (John 17.1-26). Like Paul, Jesus spoke of the unity of believers in the same breath as the effectiveness of the church’s testimony (John 1.23). This unity is not abstract—like a friendly feeling or recognition of common beliefs—but visible. Sadly, the church too often fails to show the world concrete expressions of its oneness, whether the problem manifests itself in the form of church splits or believers’ complaints and gossip.

The church throughout history has been plagued by those who fail to allow the gospel to move from their heads and hearts to their hands and feet. Against this unhealthy separation of faith and action, the apostle held out the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus, and Paul himself. All three understood that Christian commitment means letting go of protecting our own interests and instead seeking the best for the others. A theology that divides word and deed is no theology at all. A divided commitment to the gospel, as Jesus never tired of stressing, is no commitment at all. Without being harder on yourself than your Lord would be, how would you assess your belief/behavior ratio? Who in your life is an amazing example of faith in action? Who is the most humble person you know? Describe how you see that humility expressed.

1. Paul begins this section by highlighting God’s work in us – that is, the Holy Spirit, who indwells us and guides us each day. How can we rely on God to help us with our daily activities? Does the fact that Paul tells us to do all things without grumbling or complaining mean that we cannot ever voice concerns, complaints or frustrations? What is our role in God’s Kingdom work? That is, how do we appear as “lights in the world”? (2.13-15)
2. Paul speaks on how the Philippians should respond to adversity. What attitude does Paul insist on?

3. According to Paul, when do Christians “shine like stars” in the sky? How are you being a light in the world?

4. In verse 17, Paul seems to view his potential death as a sacrifice made for the sake of his ministry. How can Paul claim to be glad and rejoice under these conditions?

5. Godly living isn’t just about proper attitudes, it also requires action. What actions should we take to show our faith?

6. What does it mean to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling?” Is this a salvation issue or an expression of salvation? Explain.

7. What actions can we take to work out our salvation through humility? The Christian life should be a sacrifice if we follow Christ. Does your faith cost anything?
“Beware,” writes Paul. In chapter 3 of Philippians, Paul tells us that we must, first, beware of all that acts as an obstacle to our relationship with Christ; second, Paul tells us that nothing compares to KNOWING CHRIST. All of the world’s awards, achievements, etc, they are but Rubbish! (cf. Phil 3.8) Thus, we have to understand what knowing Christ really means in order to understand the power of Christ.

In speaking about faith in Christ—that is knowing Christ—Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote that “Genuine Christian Faith is faith in the incarnation of God in human form, something that appears to human reason to be the absolute paradox. Such a paradox is the absurd, and faith in the highest sense actually requires that its object be absurd.” Our faith in Christ is not simply a story to be told, but meant to be an active life that participates in Christ’s reconciliatory performance. Jesus calls for our full and active participation, not speculative and detached observation. “Rescue us from this error,” remarks Kierkegaard, “of wanting to admire or adoringly admire you instead of wanting to follow you and be like you.”

It remains the case, however, that for Paul God’s word of grace is secondarily but still actually-a word of judgment. That grace is also judgment is especially clear in Philippians 3, where Paul repeatedly echoes the judgment of the divine grace on his own former way of life as a Pharisee, blameless in the law-a zealous defender of the ancestral religion as he understood it, in opposition to the dangerous innovations of the Christians. That former way of life is not neutral: it is loss, mere refuse to be thrown away and forgotten. Everything that had seemed to be to his credit, whether by inheritance or by his own personal appropriation of it, serves now only to discredit him. Since he acknowledges himself as discredited, Paul is also able to discredit others, judaizing Christians who wish to impose circumcision on Gentiles, whom he denounces as "dogs, evil workers, advocates of mutilation" (3.2). Like the pre-Christian Paul, these supposedly Christian missionaries hold that righteousness is by the law, being ignorant of the righteousness of God that comes about through the faith that acknowledges God's prior act in Christ (cf. 3.9). Unlike these people, Paul and his readers "glory in Christ Jesus and do not rely upon the flesh" (3.3). For Karl Barth, the issue is as follows:

Flesh is the human creature of this aeon, existing in his own way far from his Lord, unredeemed, and as such also unredeemable. Does there exist in him, in his intentions, capabilities and achievements anything certain, reliable, trustworthy when it comes to the necessary ordering of our relationship with God? The opponent of v. 2 answers yes; Paul, in the name of the real people of God, the real pertione (circumcision), answers no.

Thus, according to Barth, Paul is not opposing “Judaism” as such but the claim that circumcision is obligatory for Christians. The expression “evil workers” (3.2) derives its force from the fact that, in early Christian usage, “worker” meant “missionary.” It is a fundamental error to believe that human achievements can bring about our endorsement by God. In the figure of "the Jew," on this account, we see before us the image of the human who wrongly relies on privileges and achievements as the basis for his or her endorsement by God, and who therefore stands under God's judgment.

Look at Phil 3.10. Eugene Peterson translates it as, “I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go
all the way with him to death itself.” The word “know” γνωσκεῖν (ginosko) means to have personal acquaintance or experience with. What did Paul want to experience, and what did he seek to gain in getting more knowledge of Christ from the experience of “his resurrection power?” Take time to think of how often we take for granted the knowledge or understanding that Christ died for us. Every time we sin against God or one another we do just this. What ways can we grow to “know Christ personally?”

In a day of accolades, titles, and awards, many of us would be hard pressed to call all of our accomplishments dung. That is exactly what Paul does. In fact, our English translations are much too kind – the Greek work used, σκυβαλοῦ (skubalo), is a word used at many sporting events and can cause an “explicit” label to be required for a CD. It is like Paul is standing up and yelling at us, saying “Hey you who are easily enticed by the world, listen up!” Eugene Peterson translates Phil 3.8 this way, “Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant — dog dung.” No mincing words here! Paul wants to ruffle feathers and cause us to step back and gasp at his choice of words. He wants to grab our attention so as to cause us to stop and actually ponder and meditate on what he is telling us here. What gets in our way of knowing Christ? What things are you holding on to that might be hindering or detracting from your faith and spiritual growth?

We sometimes speak as though our depth of feeling is all that matters in relating to God. We refer back to a time when we loved to read the Bible and pray, when we were “on fire” for the Lord and we look for a way to stir up that passion again. In this chapter, Paul warns us of the wrong kind of passion, while giving himself as an example of how to push in the right direction. To follow the example of Paul is also to follow the example of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 11.1), for Paul characteristically presents his own life story and praxis in Christological terms. In Philippians, Paul has already spoken at length of the pattern of life embodied by Christ (2.1-13), and the parallel between this passage and chapter 3 has often been noted.

1. What are you passionate about? (Super Bowl, March Madness, Clean Car, etc.) What inspires your passion and why? Do these passions ever hinder your pursuit of Christ?

2. It has been said, “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you’re sincere.” Would Paul agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
3. Paul describes what he was passionate about prior to his conversion and then he considered those things rubbish now. What were you passionate about before surrendering your life to Christ? What does it mean to say that you now view these things as rubbish?

4. Paul uses an image of a race to describe his life. What is Paul trying to tell us through the racetrack image?

5. Paul ends this chapter by talking about a passionate waiting. What is he waiting for and how does this fit with pressing toward the goal he mentioned earlier?

6. What might you have to leave behind in order to love Jesus and desire him with the same intensity as Paul? What keeps you from full obedience?

7. What are some practical ways we can grow in our knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ and our role in God’s drama?
Week 5 - Philippians 4

Throughout this letter to the Philippians, Paul expresses great concern about a number of things. He has joy, warmth and excitement in his tone, but he also expresses a sense of urgency. Paul thought he may be executed before the Philippians even received the letter, so this was his last chance to help them with their challenges. The last chapter again, calls us to focus on eternal things that are “true…noble…just…pure…lovely…admirable…praiseworthy” (v.8). If, like Paul, we confess to an intense commitment to Christ, we obligate ourselves to work for reconciliation which was brought to its fullness by the cross of Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed at 39 on April 9, 1945 by Hitler, wrote this:

The cross is laid on every Christian. It begins with the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death -- we give over our lives to death. Since this happens at the beginning of the Christian life, the cross can never be merely a tragic ending to an otherwise happy religious life. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow Him, or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time -- death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at His call. That is why the rich young man was so loath to follow Jesus, for the cost of his following was the death of his will. In fact, every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts. But we do not want to die, and therefore Jesus Christ and His call are necessarily our death and our life.

The blessed hope of Christ’s coming again casts its gracious influence over all of life. Paul prays that the Christian may have joy at all times and not be worried by cares. D.L. Moody says of verse six:

Be careful for nothing;
Be prayerful for everything;
Be thankful for anything!

Life will continue to try and knock you down, let it! Do not try to fight against the world based on the world’s standards. Instead, stand firm on the solid rock of Jesus Christ! And remember, the way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything. The prayer of faith must be a prayer of thanksgiving because faith knows how much it owes to God. Put your prayers into God’s hands and go off and leave them there. Do not worry about them. Give them completely as the farmer gives the wheat to the soil after the soil has been properly plowed. If you do this, then the peace of God will stand guard over your heart and mind.

Guard your thoughts! Paul tells us what to think about and remember. “As (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23.7 KJV). Thoughts determine your life! Think on things from above—ultimately on the Cross of Christ and what has been done on our behalf.

1. Paul has already recommended rejoicing in the Lord in chapter 3, yet he comes back to it in verse 4. What is so important about rejoicing?
2. What interferes with rejoicing and what can help you to rejoice?

3. What result does Paul promise when we pray vs. worrying?

4. In chapter 2, Paul held up Jesus as the model for our attitudes and in verse 9 he refers to himself. This could be regarded as egotistical. Why is this not the case for Paul? In what situations would it be right and even necessary to offer yourself as a model?

5. Verses 10-19, Paul discusses his gratefulness and pleasure from the support he has received from the Philippians. What does Paul promise to Philippians because of their support?

6. What is the secret of being content in every situation?
Conclusion

The Epistle to the Philippians reveals the timeless message that true joy is to be found only in a dynamic personal relationship with Jesus Christ and in the assurance that God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is able to work good in all situations as through, in, and by Christ, we can joyously proclaim alongside Paul, that “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Joy only comes through a foundation built on and in Christ. “Joy,” wrote the great theologian Augustine, “is a bird; let it fly in the open heavens, and let its music be heard of all men. Sinners are attracted to Jesus by the joy of Christians.”

Listen to the cries of the world: people are desperate to be rescued. To the businessperson, to live is wealth; to the scholar, to live is knowledge; to the soldier, to live is victory or honor; to the young man, to live is pleasure; to the man desirous of recognition, to live is fame; to the middle-aged man, to live is youthful beauty. We could go on and on, listening to the voices of the world and their quiet desperation leads to hopelessness. But ultimately, for followers of Christ, only one voice is heard—To me to live is not wealth, nor fortune, nor knowledge, nor fame, nor glory, but Christ. Christ first, last, midst all, and always Christ.

- Christ is the giver of life—“I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10.10).
- Christ is life itself—“I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2.20).
- Christ is the model of my life—“Be perfect, therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5.48).
- Christ is the aim of my life—“I desire to make known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pe 1.16).
- Christ is the reward of my life—“Thanks be to God for His indescribable!” (2 Cor 9.15).

What Paul writes to the Philippians—that is, what he once said—it is also written (or spoken) in the present tense, here and now. The truth then that Paul exposes is the reality that his thanksgiving arises from theological conviction: he and his readers must think of one another on the basis not of their contingent worldly situation but of their eternal standing before God and in Christ. From this standpoint, the various interpersonal relationships of which the letter speaks, with their accompanying anxieties, tensions, or reservations, are comprehended within the peace of God that passes understanding. This is crucial to remember because we are created to be in relationship and must not forget what Scripture continually seeks to remind us of—that thanksgiving is the acknowledgement that, whatever else may be true, the follower of Christ is who he is because he is in Christ.

All human action takes place against the background of the great drama of the movement in God and from God towards humanity. The letter to the Philippians, in the end, cannot be reduced to a single, foundational statement. Its begging, middle and end cannot be sharply differentiated from one another, for everything is simultaneously beginning, middle and end. A merely formal and static order would be a denial of the movement of the living God and the living human beings set in motion by it. We are God’s beloved, called to Live Christ, Be In Christ, Grow From Christ’s Power, and To Live Out the Fullness of Peace and Life From Christ! Amen Jesus!